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ABSTRACT

Examined was the way in which self-disclosure develops, focusing upon the family structure and communication system. It was hypothesized that affection in the family would affect the amount of self-disclosure of subjects to parents and people outside the family, and that there would be a curvilinear relationship between the degree of parental control and self-disclosure, with families in which parents and adolescents make decisions together (democratic) more conducive to self-disclosure than families in which decisions are made by parents alone (autocratic) or adolescents alone (permissive). Subjects were recruited from two groups: 13 male and 44 female high school students and 41 college students participated in the study. Subjects were interviewed individually using a modified Jourard Self-Disclosure Questionnaire and a Likert format questionnaire. Results revealed that parental affection significantly affected self-disclosure, and that degree of participation in the family has an important effect upon self-disclosure. It was suggested that self-disclosure be placed in a developmental framework, and that the structure and child rearing practices of the family definitely influence self-disclosure by providing a model for interpersonal relationships. (Author/KA)

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# Family Affection and Control in Relation to Adolescent Self-Disclosure

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Among 98 high school and college Ss, a high degree of reported parental affection was associated with high self-disclosure, not only to parents but also to friends and strangers. First-borns from democratically controlled families showed higher self-disclosure than those from autocratic or permissive homes, but later-borns showed a reverse pattern.

## Family Affection and Control
## In Relation to Adolescent Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure, or the kinds of personal information one feels comfortable revealing to others, has become a common area of study since Jourard (1958) first introduced the term. However, there has been little emphasis on how this self-disclosure develops, causing some people to disclose more than others. The family structure and communication system would seem a likely origin of self-disclosure. The relationship between parents and children is important in establishing roles and social behavior, thus affecting the ability of children to interact appropriately with others.

In particular, family affection and control were stressed. Affection towards parents (called parent cathexis) has been shown previously to influence Ss' customary level of self-disclosure (Jourard, 1971). Do parents act as models and encourage a high degree of ease with self-disclosure with persons outside the family as well, or is it the case that adolescents disclose themselves freely only in closeness of the affectionate family without generalization to other relationships? Our first hypothesis was that affection in the family will affect the amount of self-disclosure of Ss to parents and people outside the family. We also thought that the pattern of parental control determines the degree of interaction children will have with their parents and other people. Elder's (1962) seven types of parent-adolescent interdependence were condensed into three types. Permissive homes are characterized by the absence of rules and a high

degree of self-determination in decision-making. Democratic and autocratic homes both set rules, but the former includes adolescent participation in decision-making, whereas in the latter homes, parents make decisions alone. The second hypothesis was that there will be a curvilinear relationship between the degree of parental control and self-disclosure, with families in which parents and adolescents make decisions together (democratic) more conducive to self-disclosure than families in which decisions are made by parents alone (autocratic) or adolescents alone (permissive).

Subjects. Ss were recruited from two age groups: 13 male and 44 female high school students and 41 college students participated in the study.

Procedure. In individual interviews, Ss were first asked for their class in school, age, and the number and ages of any siblings, in order to determine birth order. Ss then answered the 20-item scale of the Jourard Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (1971), with some items modified to keep the content interesting and relevant to both high school and college students. They rated items on a four-point scale for the extent that they had disclosed each type of information to their mother, father, male friend, and female friend, and to what extent they would be willing to reveal this information to a male stranger and female stranger. Ss also answered a seven-item family questionnaire in Likert-format on affection (liking for parents and perceived liking from parents) and control (number of rules and amount of participation Ss had in rule making in the home.)

Results and Implications.[1] The study confirmed previous findings in the literature that high school students are significantly less disclosing than college students (Sinha, 1972). Since there were no significant differences in either reported affection, number of rules, or degree of participation in rule-making between high school and college Ss, it seems that it is age (and be implication, developmental stage) that makes the difference.

The first hypothesis, that Ss high on parental affection would be more highly disclosing than Ss lower on parental affection, was confirmed. Furthermore, parental affection not only significantly influenced self-disclosure to parents, but to people outside the family. Thus Ss who like their parents and who feel that their parents like them not only confide very highly in their parents, but generalize this high level to people outside the family - to friends and strangers of both sexes. This also leads one to think that Ss with high parental affection find it easier to make friends and even to become friendly at first contact with strangers, while those from less affectionate homes tend to be more guarded about personal information.

The second hypothesis, that Ss from democratic homes would be more highly revealing than autocratic or permissive Ss, was not supported when the control variable was considered singly. However, when birth order was included as a variable, this hypothesis was confirmed for first-borns: those from democratic homes had high total self-disclosure; those from

1 Results and their implications will be presented together in order to discuss each hypothesis in its totality.

permissive and autocratic homes were significantly less revealing. In the case of later-borns, surprisingly, the reverse effect occurred: those from permissive and autocratic homes were more confiding than those from democratic homes.

When affection was included with control and birthorder, another significant interaction was evident (see Table 1). A high degree of parental affection is associated with high self-disclosure regardless of family types. The above interaction between control and birth order takes place only among Ss relatively lower on parental affection.[2] The interaction between control, affection and birth order came as a surprise us. What could have accounted for it? Both the literature on birth order and our own data suggest that first-borns are more adult-oriented (Warren, 1966). Thus it may be that a high degree of adult-orientation leads to high self-disclosure for all first-borns in all types of control patterns. When there is less clear-cut affection, the degree of contact between parents and children encouraged in a democratically-controlled family may account for the fact that children of such families are more self-disclosing than those from autocratic or permissive ones. Note that this speculation depends on the assumption that children from permissive families, for example, make less frequent communicative contact with their parents than those in democratic families. Why the high degree of participation we assume in democratic families should affect later-borns in the reverse way we do not know. Perhaps there is something about interaction in multiple child families that causes the later-born child to

2 Low parental affection refers to scores below the median in the present study and should be taken to mean less affection rather than no affection.

withdraw into a more guarded posture. Whatever explanation we accept, it is interesting that for both first-borns and later-borns, disclosure of Ss from permissive and autocratic families is nearly equal. It seems then, that it is not so much the strictness or laxness of rules, but the degree of participation, which is highest in democratic families, that affects self-disclosure.

Thus self-disclosure can be placed in a developmental framework. This study is an attempt to explain the large individual differences among people in self-disclosure, despite theories that attribute self-disclosure to the situation alone. The structure and child rearing practices of the family do influence self-disclosure, by providing a model for interpersonal relationships.

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## Table 1

Means and Analysis of Variance for Three Control Patterns by Affection and Birth Order

| Control: | Democratic | | Autocratic | | Permissive | | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Birth Order: | FB | LB | FB | LB | FB | LB | |
| High Affection | 145.4 | 135.1 | 147.5 | 133.0 | 147.0 | 135.1 | 140.5 |
| Low Affection | 143.2 | 95.8 | 101.0 | 127.0 | 98.0 | 128.2 | 115.5 |

| Source | Sum of Squares | Degrees Freedom | Mean Square | F-Value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 85675.42 | 97 | | | |
| Between | 24643.50 | 11 | 2240.31 | | |
| Control (A) | 123.85 | 2 | 61.92 | .1 | NS |
| Affection(B) | 11348.08 | 1 | 11348.08 | 15.98 | .0005 |
| Birth Order(C) | 396.91 | 1 | 396.91 | .1 | NS |
| A x B | 170.56 | 2 | 85.28 | .1 | NS |
| A x C | 5369.03 | 2 | 2684.51 | 3.78 | .05 |
| B x C | 1043.62 | 1 | 1043.62 | 1.47 | NS |
| A x B x C | 6191.92 | 2 | 3095.70 | 4.36 | .05 |
| Error(within) | 61031.92 | 86 | 709.67 | | |